

Statement on Signing Legislation To Establish National Birmingham Pledge Week *November 17, 2000*

Recently I signed into law House Joint Resolution 102, designating National Birmingham Pledge Week. This resolution recognizes that the Birmingham Pledge is making a significant contribution in fostering racial harmony and reconciliation in the United States and around the world. By signing the pledge, signatories state their belief in the worth of every individual, that every person is entitled to dignity and respect regardless of race or color, and that every act of racial prejudice is harmful to all. Those who sign pledge themselves to actively discourage racial prejudice in themselves and others. They recognize that in honoring this pledge, they are making the world a better place.

It is entirely fitting that this pledge began in the city of Birmingham, a place of some of our most painful racial strife. We remember in particular the September 15, 1963, bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church and the death of four children there. We know that the conflicts of the past are not fully resolved today

and that we have new challenges before us. The United States is now more diverse than ever in terms of race, ethnic groups, and religion. At the same time, our world is witness to a resurgence of society's oldest demon, the inability to love our neighbors as ourselves.

In my lifetime, our Nation has never had the chance we now have to build the future of our dreams for our children. To do it, we will have to embrace our common humanity with humility and gratitude.

Hillary and I were proud to sign the Birmingham Pledge in 1998. We applaud this effort to recognize its importance nationally. We urge all Americans to use National Birmingham Pledge Week as a powerful tool for helping to build the future of our dreams for all our children, a dream of one America.

NOTE: H.J. Res. 102, approved November 9, was assigned Public Law No. 106-483.

Remarks to the American Embassy Community in Hanoi *November 17, 2000*

The President. Thank you very much. I want to thank Senator Kerry for what he said and for what he's done all these years and for being a wonderful friend to Hillary and me in many, many ways. And I want to thank Sandy Berger and our whole team in the White House and the State Department for supporting this trip from the beginning. And I want to associate myself with what Hillary said—now that she's going to be a Senator, I can just let her give the speeches, and I can say, "I completely agree." And that will save everyone from having to hear two speeches. *[Laughter]*

But I do want to say a couple of things, if I might. First, I, too, want to thank you for the endless hours you have put in in preparation for this trip and for the work you have done representing our Nation here in Vietnam. I want to thank especially the Vietnamese nationals who

work at our Embassy and who, therefore, embody this new partnership we have worked so hard to build these last several years.

We started this process of reconstructing our relationship a long time ago, and I have been working at it now, with the people on this stage and others, for at least 8 years. And I'm very grateful to all of them. But I want to take my time tonight to say a special word of thanks to Pete Peterson.

Most everybody, I guess, in Vietnam knows that he was a fighter pilot here, that he was a prisoner of war here. You may know that his wife was 9 months pregnant with their third child when he came here. He was supposed to fly 100 missions, and he was shot down two-thirds of the way through. And by the time he got home, his son was 6 years old.

What you may not know is that when I met him, he was a Congressman from northern Florida, and he represented a district in which, I promise you, he was the only American in my party who would have ever been elected from that district. [Laughter] Otherwise, any normal person would have had to be a member of the other party.

And I remember the times we spent driving through his congressional district, talking about his commitment to public service and talking about how desperately he wanted us to have a new relation with Vietnam and how he wanted to embody that, going beyond.

So when the time came for a new Ambassador to be named, I literally only considered one person. America has, I don't know how many, 270-something million people; I only considered one person to be our Ambassador to Vietnam, and Pete agreed to do it.

Now, he gave all those speeches about letting go of the past and looking toward the future, and all we can change is the future. So he—one thing I like about Pete is, he always practices what he preaches. So he comes to Vietnam, meets Vi, and starts a new life. So you are the embodiment, madam, of the future for Pete, and we thank you, and we thank you for what you have done.

He traveled all over Vietnam, just like he traveled all over America, promoting this relationship. He worked on the POW/MIA issue. He worked to advance the economy of Vietnam. Three times he led the lobbying to get our Congress to support our Jackson-Vanik waiver. His enthusiasm is completely infectious.

I understand, Pete, today, that CNN and BBC carried the signing of our bilateral trade agreement live, at 3 a.m. Hanoi time, and watch parties were held all over town. Now, that's pretty amazing.

I also want to thank him for the work he did to prevent injuries and accidents here with his safety campaign. And I want to express my sympathies, because I understand after you started this safety campaign, a mischievous television film crew caught you in a rare moment riding your motorcycle without a helmet. [Laughter] Now, that's something all of us who

have been in public life can identify with. [Laughter]

I want to thank you for befriending the villagers in the area where you were shot down and joining them to inaugurate a school. And I want to thank those of you who work in this Embassy, especially those of you who have extended your tours from 2 years to 3. I want to thank the members of the American business community, apparently who have signed a resolution cautioning the new President not to change the Ambassador in Hanoi. [Laughter] That's good advice to the new President. [Laughter]

One of the most famous sayings of the Buddha is, "Never does hatred by hatred cease; hatred ceases by love alone." This is an eternal law. Even eternal laws have to be made real in the lives of particular people, and that is a law which has been made real in the life and service of Pete Peterson.

He doesn't know I'm going to do this today, but the Ambassador has been honored for his military service with the Silver Star, the Purple Heart, and the Legion of Merit for heroism in the uniform of his country. I think his service as Ambassador to Vietnam is the most important service he has ever rendered to the United States. And so, in the presence of all of his co-workers and friends and many of their rambunctious children, which makes it even better, I am going to award Pete Peterson with the President's Citizen's Medal. And I would like the commander to read the citation and then bring the medal up here so I can give it to Pete.

[At this point, Lt. Comdr. Pat DeQuattro, USCG, Coast Guard Aide to the President, read the citation, and the President presented the medal to Ambassador Peterson. The Ambassador then made brief remarks.]

The President. Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7 p.m. in the Ballroom at the Daewoo Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Ambassador Peterson's wife, Vi Le. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Ambassador Peterson.